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Reserve

BON VOYAGE*

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When I was about 12 years old, I took my first important trip. It was a trip of 22 miles by electric trolley to visit my dad in the city. I can still recall the excitement and pleasureable thrill of anticipation that took complete possession of my inner being during those all-too-long days before departure. All that I did and thought during those days concerned the high adventure on which I was about to embark.

Without previous experience in taking trips my youthful imagination ran rampant. I had pretty largely predetermined how I would act, where I would go, what I would see and how I, as a stranger and newcomer in the city, would impress the natives, especially the boys and girls of my own age, - and how I would "wow" the folks back home with tales of a long journey and new experiences on my return.

You can imagine my chagrin when almost nothing turned out as I had anticipated. Most of my time was spent in an oculists office being fitted to a pair of glasses. What I saw of the city was through very dark glasses while recovering from the effects of eye-drops used to dilate the pupils of my eyes for better inspection. My eyes simply would not focus. The only thing I felt sure about was the guiding hand of father.

Perhaps it was just as well since later travel experience indicated that too many preconceived notions and ideas about people, places and things often led to disappointment, since they never turned out quite as anticipated.

Recently I had the privilege of taking a much longer trip. As I recall it now, its contemplation was accompanied pretty much by the same internal excitement and anticipation experienced as a boy, - but without too many preconceived notions. I thought I knew something about Germany, its people, its history, its customs, its agriculture, and had a limited use of the German language. But I was not prepared, and no amount of oral briefing could have accomplished what first-hand contact revealed. I was unprepared for the wide-spread and complete destruction of city after city where the bombs fell. The obvious demoralization of the city people, who somehow live and eke out an existence among those ruins is beyond words to describe.

*On the occasion of the departure of the 4-H Farm Exchange members for Europe to spend the summer on farms in several European countries.

I had forgotten that most German farmers live in villages, where their house, barn and sheds form their hollow-square farmyard; that heavy double gates bar your way to the only entrance to that farmyard; that farms are very small, as compared with the United States, and that the farms are divided into many small strips, no two of which, owned by the same farmer, may lay next to each other. I was rather surprised to find that the cow and the ox are still pretty largely the main sources of farm power. I was not prepared to find German farm youth so closely guarded as to what they should say or what they should join.

And now you 13 young folks are about to embark on a mission to a foreign country. You are going to different countries so some of your experiences are bound to differ. But right now, I venture that you all have something in common, you are internally excited; you are filled with anticipation and you are anxious to get going. But you have other things in common too.

In a sense you are unofficial ambassadors, - United States of America ambassadors of good will, each one of you representing 1,800,000 4-H Club members. That in itself is a heavy responsibility. Add to this the fact that you also represent, not only our segment of rural youth, but are the personification of the rising American generation representing all youth, accents further the extreme importance of your mission.

Official ambassadors to foreign countries always carry portfolios. Their brief cases are stuffed with important papers, official documents, secret messages and the like, that are securely locked, sometimes fastened to the carrier and carefully guarded. Do unofficial ambassadors also carry portfolios? Do you have one? If not, let me indicate that you should have one and some of the things it should contain. It will differ somewhat from an official one. It will never be locked. It can lay around in any convenient spot. It need not be guarded since it will contain no official papers or secret messages.

Folder #1. This is a rather thick one of mutual understanding. Understanding is the basis for proper international relations. It is of utmost importance that you get to understand the people with whom you associate and that they understand you and the purpose of your visit. In some countries, the democratic way will be challenged in light of what democracy aims to do and certain events that have occurred in America that seem to refute them. Who can say that everything American is perfect and defend all its acts?

A part of this folder should be labeled "Things America has copied and learned from the country I am visiting." Put in some papers headed discernment, comprehension, reasoned judgment and adjustment of differences.

Folder #2. Label it tolerance. The disposition to tolerate beliefs, practices and habits differing from our own, is the mark of a broad intellect. You will find things with which you may not agree but that may be best under the existing circumstances.

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Folder #3. Friendliness - sub-title Neighborliness. "Acts speak louder than words". What you do, how you do it, your general attitude will leave a greater impression than what you say.

Just a foot-note reminder labeled "proper behavior" seems quite unnecessary for you. Friendliness will overcome to some extent language barriers. A smile is universal language.

Folder #4. Patience. In Germany, one could be continually irked by the slow pace that marked progress. We in America like to do things in a hurry. Europeans do not. Be prepared to conform to the pace set, without your boredom showing.

Folder #5. Interest. Keen interest in the things other persons do, what they own and what they believe, is basic to diplomacy, tact and good personal relations, provided it is not carried to the point of being "nosey." A good listener, showing keen interest, can make a profound impression - sometimes far beyond his knowledge, his understanding or his comprehension. It is a good way to learn more about the other fellow, his thoughts and his acts and increase his respect for you by letting him talk.

Reserve and self-restraint are good sub-headings for this folder.

Folder #6. Honesty of thought. You will be called upon to describe your 4-H work, farming, country life, school work and other aspects of your life here in the United States of America. The tendency might be to explain everything in glowing terms of perfection. Be enthusiastic about your county - but also be honest.

There could be other folders added to your portfolio but let me suggest but one more.

Folder #7. Thoughts to Bring Back. Too large a part of our population have little understanding or conception of life and affairs abroad. Your mission will be but partly completed unless you bring back and dispense your constructive ideas and interpret them to the people here who are hungry for more information about our European neighbors.

Are you excited? You should be and I know a little overwhelmed. But as you launch on your journey and progress, many of the questions you have in mind will be answered and disappear. Your portfolio is filled to overflowing with good advice, ideas and a taste, at least, of the language of the country you are about to visit. You cannot possibly remember it all. You are not expected to. Keep in mind that human nature is pretty much the same the world over and part of the fun is going to be in your ignorance of things rather than your knowledge. I know that my lack of the German language amused some of my German friends very much, as did their lack of English amuse me. In trying to help each other out we did much more for better understanding than merely to learn a few more foreign words.

So yours is an important mission. It becomes more important, since you will be grass-roots ambassadors serving at a level where official understanding between nations rarely penetrates, - the place where more common understanding is sorely needed for a peaceful world.

We know you are equal to the job - a job in which the 4-H Club organization is privileged, among its many endeavors, to help create better international relations. You are about to play a most vital part in that all-important undertaking.

So take with you the best wishes and the full confidence of the entire Extension Service, all other 4-H Club members in the nation, and particularly this group of Federal officials, State 4-H Club Leaders and delegates assembled here.

Our wish is - pleasant journey! Happy landings! Safe return!
Bon Voyage!

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